



On your marks

God sometimes feels so close while at other times he seems to be out of reach and out of sight. Sometimes God startles us by the immediacy of his presence but then God is gone again, drawing us on by his very absence. The following outline focuses on one event from the life of David when he felt particularly close to God and was filled with ecstatic joy.

Get set

This story is told in two places in the Bible: 2 Samuel 6:1-23 and 1 Chronicles 13, 15 and 16.

Also linked to this theme are Psalms 132 and 105. Psalm 27 also picks up the theme of seeking God, to which David was inspired because of events like this.

You will need a largish cardboard box, gold paper or paints, poles and general craft materials.

Go!

1 David has reached a pivotal moment in his career. After years on the run in the wilderness, he is at last king, following the death of Saul in battle with the Philistines. For a while he ruled in Hebron as King of Judah but now, after the capture of Jerusalem, which becomes his new capital (Zion, the City of David), he is finally proclaimed King of all Israel. God has been faithful and has blessed him. From being a king in waiting, to being a king in exile, then to becoming a king in part, he is now a king in reality.

Using a pack of playing cards, spread them all out face-down across a large surface, so each card is separate. Begin your time together on this theme by hunting for the kings. Let each child take a turn at revealing one of the cards and then turning it back facedown if it is not a king. How long will it take to find all four kings? Once they're all found, use the kings from the different suits to tell the story of David so far:

King of Spades - he was chosen as king while still young but this was not actually recognised and he still worked as the youngest son, often being given the rubbish jobs!

King of Clubs - everyone now recognised David's kingly qualities, especially after the fight with Goliath, but instead of being on the throne he ended up on the run from Saul, fighting to survive.

King of Diamonds - after Saul's death, he became a king in Hebron but he was still not yet king of the whole country.

King of Hearts - finally he was proclaimed king of all Israel, with the allegiance of everyone's heart and ruling from his new capital in Jerusalem.



2 And David did not forget he owed it all to God: the God to whom he had composed psalms out on the hillside as a young shepherd; the God who had enabled him to defeat Goliath - 'I've come out to fight you in the name of the Lord All-Powerful' (1 Samuel 17:45, CEV); the God who had protected him again and again in the wilderness; the God who had helped him defeat his enemies.

Despite all this, we don't read of any one moment in David's life when he felt he came particularly close to God and was overwhelmed by God's presence, except perhaps for today's story when he was on his way into Jerusalem with the sacred chest (the ark).

3 David was clearly caught up in the worship of heaven right here on earth. His wife thought he had made a fool of himself, but David knew that it was God's opinion of him that mattered and that he had expressed his devotion to God publicly and dramatically as he danced in front of the ark.

As a group, re-enact the story scene by scene. Use a large cardboard box as the ark. You will also need two broom-handles to move it without touching the box.

Scene 1 - David gathers people together to search for the Ark, which has been neglected for so long.

Scene 2 - David begins to bring the Ark towards Jerusalem but a disaster occurs. No one has understood just how sacred the chest is. It tips and someone touches it by mistake and dies. This scares David and he leaves it in a safe place for several months.

Scene 3 - David finally makes plans to bring the Ark into Jerusalem, taking great care now as to who handles it and how it should be moved. Use the box as the Ark and then work out together how to move it without touching it! After a while introduce the broom-handles to help make a makeshift litter.

Scene 4 - Put together a scratch orchestra to accompany the Ark's arrival in Jerusalem. The story says there were harps, trumpets and cymbals. What makeshift instruments can you get together or what sounds can you make to enact this scene? Also, choreograph an appropriate dance for David and some of the others as the Ark is brought in and have someone play Michal, looking on with disapproval.

Scene 5 - Choose a song to sing which captures the joy of that special moment. Psalm 105 in the Bible is the actual psalm that accompanies this story. At various points in your drama, freeze the action and interview individuals in different scenes and in character as to what they are feeling, thinking and saying at that moment.

4 For David the sacred chest (Ark) becomes a focus both for thanking God for all that has happened and praying to God about the future. Look in some picture Bibles or in a Bible dictionary for a picture of what the Ark might have looked like. Can you find out who made it originally and what was kept inside it? (See Exodus 25:10-22.)

Now, as a group, design and build your own model Ark. You'll probably need some of the following to hand: a largish cardboard box; some poles; plenty of gold paper or gold paint; some imaginative

ideas as to how to represent winged angels for the top; an idea for the two tablets of stone engraved with the commandments that will be inside.

There are plenty of aspects to this design that can be worked on by different members of the group individually or as teams. As far as possible, use the children's ideas, offering guidance rather than fully formed plans for them to follow.

5 Read Psalm 132, which is a poem about what happened that day when the ark was brought into Jerusalem. Psalm 27 could also easily have been a psalm for that day, particularly from the perspective of what it meant for David. This was a moment of great spiritual awareness for him, like 'seeing God', and it drew him on to go on searching for that same closeness to God in all his life - read verses 4-10 in particular ('I am eager to see your face, so don't hide from me', vv.8-9). Imagine how David must have felt that day and how he might have described it to others later that evening. Can the group try to put themselves in David's shoes and express what he might have said?

For all of us, just as for David, there are often moments when God seems very close and these times help us to keep on track for God, as they helped David. Unfortunately Michal, his wife, never understood that! You may be able to talk with your group about ways in which they feel they can 'see God' today in the same sort of way - moments of great closeness to God that help us to keep on believing. Maybe it was something that happened in a particular event at church; or through a special story they have read or heard; or perhaps when they have been praying and experienced answers to prayer; or when they were with certain people who inspired them. Encourage the children to thank God for those special moments and, as David did in his psalms, to find some way of recording them for themselves so that they do not forget.

6 If you have made an ark, use this now as a focus for your prayer time together. If not, use a picture of an ark from a book or a model you have made yourself.

- The ark contained the laws of God, so it reminded them that they were to be God's special people. *Thank God that he has made each one of us special and wants us to be and do something special for him.*
- The ark contained the manna with which they had been fed in the desert, so it reminded them that God would always provide what they needed for living. *Thank God for all the good things that God gives us every day.*
- The ark contained the rod belonging to Aaron that miraculously burst into bud, so it reminded them that God can do amazing things. *Ask God to help those people who at the moment need the same sort of miracle because they are facing sadness or pain.*
- The ark was kept in the most holy place in the temple, and the space between the angels on the top was known as the Mercy Seat, so it reminded them that God will always show us kindness. *Thank God that, because of Jesus, we can always be forgiven and start again.*

7 In *The Barnabas Make and Do Bible Crafts* there is a suggestion for making a model harp such as David might have used.